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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP (JSAWYER), NEA/PPD (DBENZE), ECA/PE/C/CU (MBENSON), AGNEW PENDLETON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAQ OEXC OIIP SCUL ZR

SUBJECT: MS. ILENE EVANS, AFRICAN-AMERICAN STORYTELLER, PERFORMING ARTIST AND SINGER INSPIRES KUWAITI AUDIENCES AND CELEBRATES BLACK HISTORY MONTH IN KUWAIT

¶1. (U) Summary: Ms. Ilene Evans' Program in Kuwait from February 9 - 13, 2009 directly supported the MSP goals of explaining American culture and values, as well as encouraging democratic practices and empowering women, to a wide range of Kuwaiti audiences from different high schools and universities. Her program was attended by a large segment of Kuwaiti youth from different backgrounds, who for the first time took part in short drama plays and stories with a seasoned African-American performing artist and story teller. Ms. Evans came on a special tour to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, at the invitation of the American Embassy in Kuwait and in coordination with other posts.

¶2. (U) The program's highlight was a public performance on Tuesday, February 10, at the theater of the Al-Babtain Central Library for Arabic Poetry, which has a capacity of 400 seats. About 300 Kuwaitis, including Embassy contacts, members of the Diplomatic Corps and alumni students and professionals from past State Department programs and members of the American community also attended the program. This included a contingency of approximately 100 Kuwaiti high school students from the State Department English Language ACCESS and YES programs. The public performance was covered by four Kuwaiti television stations and the local press. Ms. Evans received a special invitation from a prominent arts patron and member of the ruling family to come back to Kuwait at the special invitation of Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiya Cultural Center. The program reinforced American values, included valuing diversity, the underlying theme of Black History Month.

¶3. (U) Ms. Evans delivered well-attended performances at two of Kuwait's largest private high schools in Kuwait, attended prominently by Kuwaitis. Each event was attended by more than 200 Kuwaiti students, who enjoyed her poetry and short story recitals. Ms. Evans was particularly effective when she drew on stories from the local Gulf popular culture and traditions, and used them to highlight similarities between Kuwaiti and American values.

¶4. (U) Many local Arabic and English dailies positively covered Ms. Evans' performances, which occupied an average of a half page, with images taken at the performances. Representatives of the top two private satellite televisions in Kuwait -- Al-Watan and Al-Rai channels -- also attended the performance. Al-Watan TV reported on its news bulletin the interviews conducted with the audience and Ms. Evans, highlighting the African-American culture in the frame of cultural exchange between Kuwait and the United States. A later and more comprehensive report was aired live the next day on Al-Rai TV's daily youth program, "Raykom Shabab" [Youth Opinion], which hosted Ms. Evans for a 10-minute segment. In the segment, she discussed her visit and programming in Kuwait. She also gave a brief summary about African-American culture and its strong tradition of storytelling. Ms. Evans was also interviewed by the reporter of Al-Jarida, considered one of the Kuwait's most widely read new Arabic language dailies.

¶5. (U) Embassy Kuwait thanks ECA/PE/C/CU for supporting and arranging Ms. Ilene Evans' visit to Kuwait with Bronitsky & Associates. She was an excellent performing artist, storyteller and

speaker who inspired many young Kuwaitis by drawing on their enthusiasm for their own strong tradition of storytelling.

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